



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Intimate Lighting by Ivan Passer
Claire Clouzot

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UN UOMO A META

relationships with his mother, his brother, and the girl Marina in a marvelous series of eerie close-ups in profile and full-face. Faces are layered in the frame, they overlap in and out of focus. There is a ritual patterning of the images here, a peeling away of masks and identities. In one shot, the frame is filled with a close-up of the blurred profiles of Marina and the brother; out of focus, the two faces merge into one. They draw apart and the blurred image splits in half like a torn photograph, to reveal Michael's face in painfully sharp focus. Like a Siskind photograph of a peeling billboard, parts of faces emerge from behind other parts of faces. In another scene, Michael, his face backlit so that it is very dark but still in focus, watches Marina and his brother dancing. The couple is brilliantly lit, but photographed out of focus, so that the dancers resemble the *pointilliste* figures in the paintings of Seurat, figures built out of glittering points of light.

With images stylized almost to the point of abstraction, augmented with beautifully rhythmic editing and sharply drawn performances, De Seta has constructed a film that keeps forcing us to put the pieces together, to integrate the light and the dark. It is this continually changing interplay of patterns that makes De Seta's film rewarding to watch, and that brings elegance and originality to this film study of a well-traveled interior landscape.—MARGOT S. KERNAN

INTIMATE LIGHTING

Director: Ivan Passer. Script: Jaroslav Papousek, Vaclav Sasek, and Ivan Passer. Camera: Josef Strecha, Miroslav Ondricek. Music: Oldrich Korte. With: Vera Cesadlova, Jan Vostreil, Karel Blazek, Zdenek Bezusek, Jaroslava Stedra, Vlastimila Vlkova, Karel Uhlik.

So far Ivan Passer has been generally known as Milos Forman's assistant, friend, collaborator, and co-scriptwriter on *Peter and Pavla*, *A Blond in Love*, and Forman's last and not yet released film, *Careful, Baby!* This led me to wonder to what extent Formanian realism and "objective observation" pervade *Intimate Lighting*, Passer's first long feature (1965). But in this film, which looks on first viewing like "scenes illustrating the visit of an urban musician to the peasant home of his former fellow-student," or "the city-rat at the country-rat's," there suddenly spring forth flashes of fantasy or even lunacy which go far beyond Milos Forman's down-to-earth vision.

At first the scenery is very familiar and even looks like the set-up for a good bourgeois Western comedy: the pretext of the trip to the country brings together the two old mates, Bambas and Petr, plus Bambas' wife, Petr's mistress, and also Bambas' old parents. And it actually starts like a comedy, with its easy contrast between the well-dressed, well-made-up citizens of the dangerous and corrupted capital and the simple-looking, inarticulate family of peasants—notably Bambas' wife with her neglected appearance and wide hips. The comic tone is accentuated further by the presence of Jan Vostreil in the part of Bambas' old father—the marvelous actor who played the father in both *Peter and Pavla* and *A Blond in Love*. He improvises in his joyous and exuberant manner and almost steals the limelight when explaining how he is reduced to playing the trumpet in the village band on the occasion of pilgrimages or funerals.

In the first third of the film, however, limited entirely to the description of Bambas and his family, as Petr and his mistress discover them, Passer's humor is systematically aimed at the divergences in the evolution of the two men

(city elegance and awareness against village clumsiness and ignorance) and of the two women (the coquettish and childless one against the plain and "functional" country cow). Here Passer's humor is no longer Formanian, nor objective-descriptive; it wants to prove something. The comedy turns into a moralizing fable and a message of the kind "you can find mediocrity everywhere" is delivered. The two men's ambitions or rather lack of ambitions make them equals; there is no difference in normative value between their present professional and conjugal situation. The failure of a student-composer turned into a peasant who thinks only in terms of feeding his family is equal to that of an instrumentalist turned into an employed member of a city orchestra who is able to keep up a lady. The fact that Bambas owns a car and Petr a mistress would make them even more equal, were it not for the fact that Vera Cesadlova's emptiness and boredom prove something else: that if the men are equal, the women are not. The insistent contrast between the two feminine representatives finds its worst climax (by "worst," I mean oversimplified) in the sequence of Vera Cesadlova, the idle bourgeois woman, sitting in a car while a group of working peasant women with their rakes on their shoulders pass by silently and stare reproachfully at her.

These comments on the first part of the film do not do justice though to the style of *Intimate Lighting* which is not verbal but visual. The humor, the contrast, the "systematic" aspects I underlined take place at the level of the image, not of the dialogue. (Most of the latter is improvised by nonprofessional actors—I believe only Jan Vostrcil and Vera Cesadlova, Milos Forman's wife, are professionals.) Cinematographically, it expresses itself for instance in the lovely tricky dissolves which are a little too lovely and tricky to be taken seriously: the dissolve from the dead chicken in the garage to the funeral procession, or the one from the fat peasant-woman in shorts mowing the fields to the old lady dancing in the tavern after the funeral.

But Ivan Passer does not let *Intimate Lighting* fly low for very long in its moralizing world of "intimacy." Suddenly he propels it into a new dimension by introducing at unexpected moments something slightly unusual, a little too prolonged or too insistent, just enough to disturb us and make us aware of a palpable crack in the solid wall of ordinary reality. Three episodes illustrate this passage to another level. The first one takes place during a beautifully described family meal where nobody can get enough food and a piece of chicken is shoved from plate to plate until the two "civilized" visitors from the city burst into giggles. And what started perhaps as embarrassed laughter turns, with Vera Cesadlova, the mistress, into hilarity, then into near-hysterics. She cannot stop laughing during the scene as well as when she remembers it, a long time after the others have quieted down.

The second touch of the inhabital occurs when the grandmother, while helping the young mistress make the bed, starts unexpectedly to tell her the story of her past in a circus. She demonstrates on the table a few of the acrobatics she used to perform but does so, of course, with the clumsiness caused by her weight and age. . . .

Another instance is in the tradition of the black Czech lunacy to be found in the cinema of Jan Nemec, Jiri Menzel, or Evald Schorm, as well as in the literature of Bohumil Hrabal. In a brief scene of boredom, Vera Cesadlova is shown wandering around the backyard of the house, eating an apple which she shares with the village half-wit who passes by. Far from being scared by his idiotic, toothless face, she accepts his compliments and carries on an almost flirtatious conversation. The half-wit, right out of Luis Buñuel's *Viridiana*, approaches her (and us by close-ups) and is kept away only by a thin wire-fence: an intrusion of the monstrous into our familiar everyday life.

In between these episodes, the film goes back gently to the humorous description of the house and its inhabitants, to the point of picturesqueness, as in the bravura piece of the

rehearsal of a Mozart quartet, which is massacred by Bambas, his father, Petr and a friend from the village. Cacophonously, they try to follow each other while improvising (and superimposing over the music) a hilarious dialogue. We then forget the cracks in reality indicated almost inadvertently by Passer, and we surely would forget them if the film were to finish on this realistic note. But beyond the finesse of *Intimate Lighting*, its ironical sense of observation made up of nuances, lies a big question mark which casts doubt on the whole film and makes of it an unanswered interrogation. Abruptly, the last shot, which shows the six characters standing up to drink a solidified porto-flip, freezes and remains frozen until the word "end." We are left with this stop-frame and shall never know what comes next. Stiffened for eternity into the gesture of the drinker, their heads bent back and elbows raised, the humble protagonists of *Intimate Lighting* become the inhabitants of some modern Pompei, as if the only possible refuge from mediocrity and failure were to be found in the immobility of fossilization.

In spite of the visual poetry of this last image, the lighting used here by Ivan Passer seems to me apocalyptic rather than "intimate" and it retrospectively enhances the whole picture, by giving it a new and more disturbing dimension.—CLAIRE CLOUZOT

A MAN AND A WOMAN

Written, directed, and photographed by Claude Lelouch. With Jean-Louis Trintignant and Anouk Aimée.

"More matter, with less art," says Gertrude to Polonius. And one could say the same to Claude Lelouch, director of *A Man and a Woman*, though unlike Polonius, he wouldn't answer. "Madam, I swear I use no art at all." The point is that the film is *all* "art" and little if any "matter," and if one likes films about pretty colors and pretty people, fine. But some of us want more.

A MAN AND A WOMAN

The first thing one notices in *A Man and a Woman* is the switching from color to black and white or sepia and other tinted stocks. At first it seems that this switching is going to have some significance: the present is black and white (or brown and white, or blue and white), while the past, more "real" to the Man and the Woman, will consistently be in color (and then at the end, when both manage to put the past aside, the present will become colored and everything will be Okay, right?). Only it doesn't work out that way, and the switching soon becomes confusing and meaningless. Granted, the color is very beautiful, as is the photography generally; but then *all* photography seems to be beautiful these days, so what of it? It's also very fast: the camera is constantly swinging, turning, jiggling, and bouncing around, and one soon suspects that all this camera movement serves to disguise the fact that there is no *real* movement, exterior or interior, on the part of the characters. If two people are walking along the beach, why does the camera have to move differently than they do? It makes sense for the Beatles, but then the Beatles can sing.

As for the characters themselves, they are about as interesting as the windshield wipers that we see so much of. They are fashionable, that's certain. The script girl (with the wardrobe and the apartment of an heiress) and the racing driver are "in" types; but the occupations aren't made convincingly relevant to the people's lives or thoughts. Both dead spouses are equally lacking in conviction. All that we really find out about the Woman's dead husband is that he looked young and boyish and loved the samba (which is really a bossa nova,

